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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 03/07/06

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#### 1) TOP HEADLINES

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Tokyo Metropolitan Government warns against high levels of lead

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detected in imported accessories for children

Yomiuri:

Government's draft of rescue guidelines gives priority to the aged and the disabled in event of disasters, avoids uniform treatment

Nihon Keizai:

Council on Fiscal and Economic Policy plans to specify sector-by-sector cuts in expenditures in the reform timetable; A maximum 20 trillion yen cut planned in such areas as social welfare, local allocation tax; Binding force to constrain tax increase

Sankei:

AT&T's purchase of BellSouth casts doubts about splitting up NTT; US certain to enter an age of two major telecoms

Tokyo Shimbun:

Japan Post mulling opening postal saving banks in more than 200 places across the nation; Objections may arise with the possibility of bringing pressure on private-sector banks

#### 2) EDITORIALS

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- (2) Iran's nuclear ambitions: Not yet time to throw our hands up

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- (2) China's National People's Congress: No immediate remedy to create an integrated society

Yomiuri:

- (1) New corporate recruitment: A good utilization of a broad range of choices
- (2) Air gun regulations: Sale of dangerous weapons has been allowed

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- (1) China's National People's Congress: Steel beneath the smile
- (2) Japanimation: Time to face hard truth

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- (1) China's National People's Congress: Hope for agriculture?
- (2) Revitalization of urban areas: The viewpoint of the elderly necessary

3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, March 6

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

08:02

Met at Kantei with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Suzuki.

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09:00

Attended an Upper House Budget Committee session.

12:03

Returned to Kantei.

13:00

Attended the Upper House Budget Committee session.

17:05

Attended an LDP executive meeting.

17:57

Met at Kantei with Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Yosano.

18:40

Met with Economy, Trade, and Industry Minister Nikai.

19:05

Dined with Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy members, including BOJ President Fukui and Japan Business Federation Chairman Okuda.

21:16

Returned to his residence.

4) Gov't to put off GSDF pullout originally scheduled for this month

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Abridged)  
March 7, 2006

The government will postpone the timetable for pullout of Ground Self-Defense Force troops in the southern Iraqi city of Samawah until after April, officials said yesterday. The GSDF had planned to begin recalling the Samawah-based troops this month. In Iraq, however, Islamic Sunnis and Shiites are intensifying their conflict. In such a situation, the two conflicting groups cannot be expected to enter into talks for a permanent government. As it stands, the government has now made the decision. The US government, frowning on Japan's troop pullout planned for March, asked Japan to continue its troop deployment in Iraq. Japan is now expected to comply with the request.

Britain, meanwhile, has told Japan that British troops, currently tasked with the security of Samawah, would pull out in March. The government has therefore coordinated its plan to begin withdrawing the GSDF troops and complete their withdrawal in May.

In late February, however, a bomb exploded at a Shiite mosque in the central Iraqi city of Samara. The incident touched off conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites, resulting in deteriorating security conditions in Iraq. The government judged

that Iraq has yet to recover its public security and has seen no progress in its political process, and that such a situation still does not allow the GSDF to pullout.

5) GSDF troops to begin pullout not until mid-April or later;  
Government to send 100-strong support unit to Iraq

SANKEI (Page 1) (Excerpts)

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March 7, 2006

The government decided yesterday to begin pulling Ground Self-Defense Force troops out of southern Iraqi city of Samawah in mid-April or later. The decision follows Britain's step to postpone withdrawing its troops carrying out security duties in Samawah. Australian troops will continue providing support until all GSDF troops are out of Iraq. The government intends to send a 100-strong withdrawal support unit to Iraq. The government also plans to hand over the GSDF camp in Samawah to Iraqi authorities.

Working-level foreign and defense officials of Japan, US, Britain, and Australia met in London on Feb. 24. At the London meeting and subsequent informal talks, the British government sounded out other countries on a plan to withdraw its troops from Samawah starting in mid-April.

The British government, which intended to beef up its troops in Afghanistan in May, had initially studied a plan to begin withdrawing from Samawah in March. Britain, however, eventually decided to postpone such a plan due to: (1) the deteriorating security situation in Iraq because of intensifying religious conflict; (2) the need to watch the future of a full-fledged Iraqi government; and (3) US discontent with Britain withdrawing from Iraq before the situation calms down.

As a result, Japan decided to withdraw GSDF troops starting in mid-April or later by keeping pace with British troops. Even if Britain begins withdrawal in mid-April, it can reportedly complete the withdrawal by the end of May, as originally scheduled. In contrast, it would take more than two months for the GSDF to leave Iraq. Complete withdrawal may not occur until June or later.

6) Japanese, Russian foreign ministers agree to settle Iranian nuclear issue peacefully

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

Foreign Minister Taro Aso discussed Iran's nuclear program and other matters with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, for about 30 minutes on the phone lastnight. Aso praised Moscow's proposal to Teheran to pursue a uranium enrichment program in Russia instead of its own nuclear activities in Iran. The two foreign ministers reached an agreement on the need to settle the issue peacefully.

Aso placed the call to Lavrov prior to the International Atomic Energy Agency opening its board meeting on Iran's nuclear program in Vienna on March 6, local time, according to the Foreign Ministry.

7) Japan-South Korea strategic dialogue to pave way for post-Koizumi relations; Agreement reached to promote future-oriented relationship

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

Though Japan's Asian diplomacy has cooled down due to Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, working-level talks

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are now picking up. As part of the move, Tokyo and Seoul held strategic talks in Tokyo yesterday. A two-day bureau-director-level meeting between Tokyo and Beijing also started in Beijing yesterday to discuss the development of gas fields in the East China Sea. There is a deep-seated view on both sides that it will be difficult to repair the strained bilateral relationship before September, when the prime minister's tenure as the president of the Liberal Democratic Party expires. However, the move seems to point the way to build post-Koizumi bilateral relations.

At the outset of the meeting with South Korea, Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi stressed: "Both Japan and South Korea share freedom, democracy, and a market economy. They are both allies with the US. Friendship and cooperation between the two countries is extremely important for peace and stability in Northeast Asia." South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Yu Myung Hwan responded, "I am pleased that we can now exchange views with Mr. Yachi after a long time since we met in Seoul last October."

The strategic dialogue was held for the first time since last October, when the prime minister visited Yasukuni Shrine. Yu and Yachi agreed to promote a future-oriented relationship, including expanded exchanges of young people, but they remained at odds over the Yasukuni issue. During a speech given on Mar. 1, South Korea President Roh Moo Hyun criticized Koizumi's Yasukuni visits. A growing view among Japanese government officials is that it will be difficult to resume the suspended shuttle diplomacy between the leaders of the two countries while Koizumi is in office.

The two countries are, however, continuing working-level talks amid the suspension of mutual visits by their leaders, envisaging post-Koizumi relations. South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon has entered the race to succeed UN Secretary General Annan, who is to rotate out at the end of the year. Japan's support is essential for South Korea. The continuation of strained relations with Japan, with which it has a close economic relationship, is disadvantageous to it, too.

Japan is in the same situation. Signing a free trade agreement (FTA) with South Korea is a model FTA case, because it can expect expanded trade and strengthened corporate competitiveness from it. The FTA talks with South Korea were suspended last December, and there are no prospects for resuming them. The setback could undermine Japan's economic diplomacy as a whole.

8) Japan, China in agreement to resume six-party talks as swiftly as possible

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

By Hidetoshi Ikebe, Beijing

The Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director-General Kenichiro Sasae, now in China to attend the senior working-level talks with China on the explorations of natural gas fields in the East China Sea, yesterday met with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei at the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The two diplomats agreed on the need to resume the six-party talks as quickly as possible. Sasae said to Wu: "We hope to see China make even more efforts as the host nation to restart the six-nation

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talks." Wu replied, "We'll continue our efforts to work on the United States and North Korea," explaining North Korea's moves. Sasae also met with the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Asian Affairs Bureau Director-General Hu Zhengyue yesterday and exchanged views about specific approaches to enliven cultural exchanges.

9) China rejects Japan's proposal for joint gas field development in East China Sea; Both sides still far apart on joint development

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
March 7, 2006

By Hidetoshi Ikebe, Beijing

Senior working-level talks between Japan and China to discuss the development of natural gas fields in the East China Sea began at the Diaoyutai State Guest House in Beijing yesterday afternoon. The Chinese delegation declared its intention not to accept Japan's proposal for the joint development of four gas fields, including Shirakaba (or Chunxiao in Chinese), located near the equidistance line between Japan and China. That proposal had been offered in the previous round of talks held at the end of last September. In the talks yesterday, both delegates went no further than to explain their respective positions. They will continue the talks today. On the occasion of the talks held late last May, China came up with a joint gas field development proposal within the Japanese territory on the east side of the Japan-China medial line, but Japan turned it down. In the previous meeting, Japan offered a counterproposal, and China took it back home, saying, "We'll discuss it."

The talks this time were attended by Kenichiro Sasae, director-general of the Foreign Ministry's Asia and Oceanian Affairs, Nobuyuki Kodaira, director-general of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency and other officials from Japan. The Chinese delegation included Hu Zhengyue, director-general of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Asian Affairs Bureau.

10) Futenma relocation at top meeting: Yamasaki

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Abridged)  
March 7, 2006

Former Liberal Democratic Party Vice President Taku Yamasaki, currently presiding over an LDP panel on security affairs, held a press conference yesterday at the Japan National Press Club, in which he indicated that Prime Minister Koizumi and Okinawa Gov. Inamine would make a political decision over the pending issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in the city of Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture, to a coastal area of Camp Schwab in the island prefecture's northern coastal city of Nago. "This issue will be settled at a top-level meeting of Prime Minister Koizumi and Governor Inamine," Yamasaki said. "We'll have to be in a hurry for coordination," he added.

Yamasaki also noted that Inamine has been raising questions about the Futenma relocation plan while taking the position that it runs counter to the agreement of the Special Action Committee on Facilities and Areas in Okinawa (SACO). In this regard, he insisted that the government should ask for local understanding in an even more careful manner, suggesting the need for the

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government to explain that the plan is within the framework of the SACO accord.

11) Koizumi rules out meeting with Inamine over Futenma relocation

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

Prime Minister Koizumi has ruled out the possibility of meeting with Okinawa Gov. Inamine over the bogged-down issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture to a coastal area of Camp Schwab in the island prefecture's northern coastal city of Nago. "Officials have met with him, so I'm not sure about that," Koizumi told reporters yesterday evening. "I don't know about that in the future, though," he said.

12) Japan, US to finalize USFJ realignment even without local consent: Abe

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

The Japanese and US governments will work out a final report on the planned realignment of US forces in Japan even without local consent, Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe told a news conference yesterday. The government has now run into rough waters with Okinawa and other base-hosting localities over the issue of realigning the US military presence in Japan. The Japanese and US governments are expected to release a final report in late March on specific realignment plans. "I hope that the government can obtain local consent at the earliest possible date before that," Abe said. "But when it comes to the final agreement," he added, "Japan and the United States have been negotiating, so that will be the final agreement after the negotiations." The Japanese and US governments will resume working-level consultations today in Hawaii over the US military realignment, with their senior officials for foreign affairs and defense attending. The two governments are expected to push for coordination to work out the final report late this month. However, officials deem it difficult to obtain base-hosting local communities' agreements before releasing the final report.

13) Nukaga remains at odds with Nago mayor and others over Futenma relocation plan

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

Defense Agency Director General Fukushima Nukaga dined together last night in Tokyo with mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro of Nago, the relocation site for the US Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, as well as Higashi Mayor Shigeru Miyagi and Kin Mayor Tsuyoshi Gibu, to exchange views on the relocation plan.

Shimabukuro and others reiterated their request for the government to present a revision to the plan to relocate the airfield to Cape Henoko, agreed upon by Japan and the US last year, saying, "We would like to see the government listen to local requests and alter the plan even slightly."

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In response, Nukaga said: "We will listen to local requests, but talks are underway between Japan and the US. I hope you will understand the Cape Henoko plan." The two sides remained far apart.

14) No revision to Futenma relocation plan

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

Referring to the Okinawa rally held in opposition to the planned transfer of US forces' Futenma heliport, Defense Agency Vice Minister Takemasa Moriya yesterday told reporters: "We are aware that the people of Okinawa are highly interested in the issue. However, we have reached an agreement with the US with the intention to improve the situation in Okinawa as soon as possible, taking into account the past circumstances." He thus reiterated that the government has no intention of revising the plan to transfer Futenma functions to the coastal part of Camp Schwab.

15) Minshuto losing guts to fight, hardly touches on four main issues in Upper House Budget Committee meeting

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

The House of Councillors Budget Committee started deliberations on the fiscal 2006 budget yesterday. This session was a good chance for Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), which has been hurt over the fake e-mail fiasco, to take a step forward to reconstruct itself. But the opposition party kept a low profile, hardly touching on four controversial issues, including the Livedoor scam and the faulty architectural standards issue.

Azuma Koshiishi, who took the floor as the first questioner from

Minshuto, said: "I would like to ask about Prime Minister Koizumi's determination in addressing administrative reform at the current Diet session." This was the very theme of which the prime minister wanted to speak even if there were no question, so the premier shot back: "The main purpose is to simplify and make effective (the jobs of) the government."

In response promptly, Koshiishi said: "We have defined this session as a 'safety session.' We are in stark contrast with you." But the prime minister replied: "Safety is also the top priority for the government. An administrative reform Diet session and a safety Diet session are not contradictory." As it stands, Koshiishi's question ended up stage-managing the administrative reform Diet session.

Koshiishi and other Minshuto members did not take up the so-called four-point package. Only Tasuo Hirano, the last questioner from Minshuto, briefly referred to the US beef issue, but he stopped shy of deeply pursuing the Japanese government's responsibility. His remark also gave Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Minister Shoichi Nakagawa a chance to speak of his determination. Nakagawa said: "Although there were problems on the US side, Japan will also make its utmost efforts."

Hirano concluded his question with this remark: "Minshuto is in a quite serious situation, but it is now on the path to its

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reconstruction. Ruling party members, you just wait." But in the Diet session yesterday, the will to fight was not detected among Minshuto members.

16) Minshuto less energetic, while LDP's Katayama takes shine of Minshuto at Upper House Budget Committee session

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

The House of Councillors yesterday started a basic question-and-answer session at the Budget Committee. As the Livedoor e-mail fiasco caused by a Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) lawmaker has dragged on, yesterday's Lower House Budget Committee session was conducted under the leadership of the ruling parties. Representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) posed questions with ease at the session, while seeking to stymie the largest opposition party with the e-mail issue.

The LDP intends to bring up the so-called set of four issues, including the earthquake-resistance data falsification scam, if Minshuto does not. Counterintuitively, it was Minshuto's questioners who were hesitant.

LDP Upper House Caucus Secretary General Toranosuke Katayama, the first questioner of the ruling parties, categorically said, "Since the Lower House was unable to spend much time for deliberations in the second half of the session because of the e-mail uproar (raised by Minshuto), we will carry out heated debate on policies." Minshuto members could only sit silently and listen to Katayama's statement.

Katayama launched into his idea on the so-called trinity reform that would rearrange taxation and fiscal relations between the central and local governments. He underscored the importance of transferring tax collection authority to local governments. He then said to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, "I want you to focus your reform drive on that point."

Meanwhile, Yukihiro Tani of Minshuto mainly focused on the reconstruction of Ashikaga Bank, which is located in his home constituency. He did not raise the issue of US beef imports, even though he had planned to do so.

Tatsuo Hirano, Minshuto's second questioner, addressed the government's monetary policy and the trinity reform. He then brought up the beef issue, but he only went so far as to say, "We want the government to make clear what it will demand from the



United States." His pursuit of the government lacked punch.

17) Heated debate between Inoguchi and Reiho over spending for falling birthrate measures

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

At a House of Representatives Budget Committee session yesterday, Minshuto lawmaker Reiho and Kuniko Inoguchi, state minister in charge of measures for the declining birthrate, traded barbs over how much should be spent for measures to counter the falling birthrate and whether expenses for delivery should be free of charge. Of the total of approximately 80 trillion yen in the

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state budget for fiscal 2006, 1.58 trillion yen is allocated for measures to counter the falling birthrate.

Reiho asked Inoguchi's view on the 1.58 trillion yen: "Don't you think the budget is extremely small?" Inoguchi, however, reacted strongly, responding, "I think we were able to secure the necessary budget within the framework of the state budget."

Inoguchi made a statement at a press conference in January that the idea of making expenses for delivery free of charge would be considered. She, however, later corrected her earlier remarks after meeting Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, saying, "I did not say that we would look into it." With this regard, Reiho questioned the minister, "Did Mr. Abe warn you about it?"

Inoguchi responded, "Making delivery charges free is one of the requests I have received." Abe also stated: "Issues will not be resolved only by making expenses for delivery free. We would like to implement various measures in addition to conventional measures."

18) Government makes 20 inquiries about USDA beef report

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 5) (Full)  
March 7, 2006

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare yesterday submitted to the US government a set of questions about a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) report on the issue of vertebral columns found in a US beef shipment to Japan. The inquiries include whether there were any problems with the US inspection system and what measures USDA plans to take to prevent a recurrence of a similar incident. The paper noted: "The US should sort out and look into problems in a comprehensive manner." It then called on Washington to present specific grounds for its assertion that the incident was a "unique" case.

The 20 questions were classified into six items, including the relevant US government institutions, the facilities in question, and preventive measures. In questions pertaining to the US government institutions, the paper seeks explanations about whether there were any problems about authorizing the facilities in questions and what training the inspectors received.

In questions concerning the meat-processing facilities, the paper asked the US to explain who was responsible for handling exports to Japan, and why that person failed to fulfill his or her responsibility. The ministries called on Washington to present to Tokyo the specific ways it is planning to implement an improvement plan for recurrence prevention, including the methods of unannounced on-site surveys of the facilities, as well as the training system for inspectors.

The USDA report was submitted to the Japanese government on Feb. 17. MAFF finished translating the contents of the report into Japanese on March 3 and held consultations with other government ministries concerned on additional inquiries.

SCHIEFFER